

Opening Remarks

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U.S. Trade Representative

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Distinguished Ministers, Director-General, Delegates, I call the meeting to order.

As Chair of this Ministerial Conference, and as United States Trade Representative, I thank you all for coming; I welcome you on behalf of the President and the United States government; and I also offer my sincere thanks to the people of Seattle, Governor Locke and Mayor Shell for the hard work they have done to prepare for this historic event.

As we open the World Trade Organization's Third Ministerial Conference this morning, it may be appropriate to reflect on the distance we have come to reach this point.

In 1948, the founders of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade took a world shattered by war; divided by ideology; fragmented and impoverished by the trade barriers erected in the 1920s and 1930s.

They had the courage and vision to imagine a different and better world. A world united by ties of mutual interest and shared benefit; a world reflecting the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes and the rule of law; a world which offered its people new opportunities for employment, rising living standards, and a stronger peace, as nations gained a stronger economic stake in peace and stability beyond their borders.

They and their successors, from the era of Truman and Churchill down to each of us here this morning, have worked together to make their vision reality. Over the years:

- We have created a network of agreements that promote prosperity and growth, promote scientific and technological progress, and strengthen the rule of law.
- We have responded to the political challenges of five decades: the era of reconstruction after the Second World War; the era of decolonization, from which over 90 nations have emerged as members of the WTO; and now the end of the Cold War, as the principles of the trading system help economic reform succeed.
- And as a result, we have created an era of growth and human progress unmatched at any time in history. As trade has grown sixteen-fold, the world economy has grown six-fold; per capita income nearly tripled; and daily life immeasurably improved.

Today, we turn the page on this era of achievement. And we open a new chapter, taking up the challenges of the 21st century in the first Round of global trade negotiations since the creation of the WTO. The agenda before us is broad:

- We can do more to create prosperity and growth by reducing the trade barriers, trade-distorting subsidies, and weaknesses in customs practices which limit the horizons of the world's farmers, entrepreneurs and service providers.
- We can do more to promote development in the world's least-developed nations, by opening markets and improving technical assistance and capacity-building, to give these countries their rightful place in the trading system.
- We can strengthen peace in the next century, by helping to ensure that China, Russia and the other nations now reforming their economies in the aftermath of the Cold war to join the WTO, on commercially meaningful grounds.
- We can respond to the challenge of the scientific and technological revolution, which is now creating new products and even new methods of trade more rapidly than ever before.
- We can ensure that the trading system does its part to protect the environment we hold in trust for future generations, and we can help to strengthen guarantees of respect for internationally recognized core labor standards.
- And we can and must respond to the fact that, in this 21st-century world, practices at odds with principles of openness and transparency are outdated; and the broadening of transparency and public access helps to both improve policies and give them broader foundations of public support. The right to be heard is fundamental. Issues raised in peaceful protest should be discussed, to ensure continued public commitment to an open trading system.

These are the tasks before us. As we take them up, we build upon a very strong foundation: fifty years of dedication and patient labor to create an institution which helps us realize our peoples' hopes of prosperity and growth; of peace and development; of scientific and technological progress; of a better world.

It has been an era of great vision; and achievement to match that vision. And over the course of this week, we can open a new era whose accomplishments build upon and transcend the past. That is our historic mission: let us prove equal to it.

I would now like to welcome our the Secretary of State Ambassador Madeleine Albright, together with the Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Mike Moore, the three Vice-Chairpersons of the Ministerial Conference, and the Chairman of the General Council. May I also welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, who is with us today. I would also

like to extend a special welcome to the first Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Renato Ruggiero, who led the organization through the first years of its existence.

With us today to open the Conference is someone whose sense of history, and whose personal experience of the changes of the past fifty years are unmatched.

Madeleine Albright is America's Secretary of State and the President's senior Cabinet advisor. By training she is a scholar; by career a diplomat and public servant; by temperament, conviction and life experience, an unswerving advocate of the principles the WTO embodies: freedom, fairness, opportunity, the rule of law, the open society.

Her arrival in the United States came just six months after the foundation of the trading system. The child of a diplomatic family, she left Czechoslovakia to escape an oppressive political system. She has been a teacher, a participant in American political debates, and a public servant. And five decades after her arrival in New York, as our Ambassador to the United Nations and as Secretary of State, she has played a central part in, among many other historic events, the rebirth of freedom throughout Central Europe.

Today, the Secretary is an inspiration to millions of American women. She is at the center of the Clinton Administration's foreign policy, with respect to both our security policies and our economic and trade initiatives. And it is our great honor to receive her as the welcoming speaker of this Conference.

I ask you now to join me in a warm welcome for the Honorable Madeleine Korbelt Albright, and I invite the Secretary of State to speak.